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AUTHOR Catherwood, Vince
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ABSTRACT

This two-part paper describes an experiment with an alternative form of evaluation of New Zealand secondary school students' English proficiency. The first part presents a background of the New Zealand secondary education system and a lengthy discussion of the procedures that led to changing from a one-time, three-hour, external examination administered since 1945 to all tenth year students in New Zealand, to an internal measurement of skill achievement based on a student language profile. The discussion includes the reasons for making the assessment internal; the procedures set up by New Zealand's National English Syllabus Committee (NESC) to guide a two-year trial period using the new assessment method; results of an evaluation by the NESC of the experiment's effects on students, teachers, principals, and parents; and a summary of the overall results of the NESC's experiment. The second half of the paper consists of a summary report of findings from a seminar on the assessment of English held in Wellington, New Zealand, in 1977, the second year of the trial period with alternative assessment. The report outlines the criteria of performance in English for the student language profile developed under these headings: speaking, listening, reading, writing, performance in other modes, knowledge, independence and involvement, cooperation and tolerance, and enjoyment. A sample language profile sheet is appended. (AEA)

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ASSESSMENT: THE NEW ZEALAND EXPERIENCE

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BACKGROUND: THE NEW ZEALAND SECONDARY EDUCATION SYSTEM

Secondary education in New Zealand includes Forms 3 to 7 (years 8 to 12 in Australia). In the third and fourth forms students study core subjects (English, Social Studies, Science and Mathematics) and a selection of elective courses. There is an increasing tendency, particularly in arts courses in co-educational schools, to group students in non-streamed classes. The most common form of class organisation in secondary schools however, is a system of grouping usually termed "broad-banding", whereby students are streamed into three broad bands on the basis of academic ability: The able students, the middle group, and the poorer achievers. Within these broad categories students are usually mixed in groups at random. A few schools still use a system of streaming on academic ability for the purpose of organising class instruction.

In the fifth forms class groupings are determined largely by subject choice as students select their five or six subjects for the School Certificate examination, the national three-hour examination held at the end of the fifth form year. Some subjects are internally assessed for this certificate, but in most subjects there is an external examination, set and moderated nationally.

In the sixth form year most students offer themselves as candidates for University Entrance, an examination conducted by the independent Universities Entrance Board. Students may be accredited (that is, internally assessed by the school). If students are not accredited, they may sit an external examination at the end of the year: in other words, they are given a second chance. About 10% of students gain their University Entrance in this way. About 50% are accredited by schools and are not required to sit the examination. University

Entrance means what it says: it gives students the right to enter the university. All sixth form students are also candidates for the Sixth Form Certificate, an award administered by the Education Department.

Most students who do go on to university, however, elect to return to school for a Form 7 year. At the end of this year they may enter the University Bursaries examination by presenting themselves for three-hour external examinations in five subjects of their choice. English is a compulsory requirement in Form 6 for University Entrance, but is not a compulsory requirement in Form 7 for the University Bursaries examination. The student who wishes to demonstrate academic excellence in Form 7 may also enter for the Entrance Scholarships examination by sitting three further three-hour papers at an advanced level. Both the University Bursaries and Entrance Scholarships examinations are administered under the auspices of the Universities Entrance Board, so that the universities have a large measure of control over assessment of the school curriculum at both sixth and seventh forms, through their control of the examination system.

ASSESSMENT AND THE CURRICULUM IN FORMS 3 - 5 ENGLISH

I should now like to look at assessment in Forms 3 - 5 (concentrating on Form 5) and discuss assessment in the context of curriculum development in New Zealand over the last 10 years. One of the crucial issues I have briefly alluded to in the initial outline of our New Zealand system in the senior school is the "backwash" effect of the assessment system on the curriculum. In New Zealand this issue is of particular concern at the fifth form since the retention rate of students at school is now such that virtually every student in New Zealand becomes a candidate for School Certificate, and since English is compulsory, a candidate in English.

In 1969 the Department of Education in New Zealand established the National English Syllabus Committee and asked it to revise the Forms 3 - 5 syllabus, produce a handbook of suggestions for teachers, and revise the School Certificate prescription for Form 5 English which had been unchanged since 1945.

The NESC responded to the request to revise the Forms 3 - 5 syllabus by writing a set of syllabus guidelines, the "Statement of Aims", which was published for discussion and consideration by teachers. Over the last 10 years this document has been the basis of a series of in-service courses at which teachers have discussed the implications of these non-prescriptive guidelines for class and school programmes in English. Three drafts of the "Statement of Aims" have been published and it would be true that in 1980 the principles outlined in the "Statement of Aims" form the basis of assessment of student performance in Forms 3 - 5 English in New Zealand.

The "Statement of Aims" lists three language aims:

- 1 To increase the student's ability to understand language and use it effectively
- 2 To extend the student's imaginative and emotional responsiveness to and through language

- 3 To extend the student's awareness of ideas and values through language.

The NESC maintained that language included production (the modes of speaking, writing, moving and shaping) and reception (the modes of listening, reading, viewing and watching). Evaluation is based on these language aims and undertaken for the benefit of students and teachers. The NESC believes that evaluation is an essential part of teaching and learning. It is undertaken for the benefit of

students:

To show appreciation of and concern for their work

To identify their strengths and weaknesses

To measure changes in their achievements

To assess changes in their interests and attitudes

To help them to recognise the present value and future usefulness of their learning

To help them to become aware of the directions that learning might take.

Teachers:

To help them with their studies

To plan and modify programmes and methods so that these allow for individual student development

To determine the balance of the language programme in relation to the students' needs

To check the consistency of the programme with the language aims to assess the effectiveness of teaching methods

To provide a basis, both objective and subjective, for reporting students' achievements.

EVALUATION

Objective Assessment

Some aspects of language, such as knowledge of conventional spelling and punctuation, can be assessed objectively. Other aspects, such as reading and listening comprehension, can also be partially assessed by the use of standardised tests. These are based, however, only on the agreed judgements of test designers, not on any absolute criteria.

Many ways of assessing students' language development may be considered:

The keeping of logs, folders, and tapes of work produced for comment

Records of teacher-student conferences about the work

Careful and continued observation and comment by the teacher and other students on activities such as role-playing, group discussion, making collages and sound pictures

The use of rapid impression marking

The use of multiple marking associated with the precise definition of the language skills involved

Formal as well as informal tests

Assessment, by an audience, of class plays, debates and similar activities.

Self-evaluation by students should be encouraged wherever appropriate.

The co-operation of teacher and students in setting goals and in determining the criteria for assessment is an important aspect of evaluation.

The above methods of evaluation are related to the language aims and reflect the wide range of purposes for which language is used.

Has Assessment in English any Value at All?

This statement of the principles of evaluation as the NESC saw it raised a number of issues in the minds of teachers which the committee was obliged to consider.

In the first place, the committee began to ask if assessment had any value at all, when most students managed to use language to communicate with reasonable facility. Teachers were assessing the performance of students in their native language. Most students seemed to be reasonably competent in their uses of certain aspects of language: They could talk, could understand most of what others said and could read and write to a certain extent. Furthermore, teachers noted that there were many aspects of behaviour in schools which were never formally assessed and reported on: breathing, walking, growing, hair colour, physical size, skin pigmentation and so on. Was language development in the same category?

What would be the results of declining to assess performance in language in English classes on the grounds that:

- a Language development is a natural result of growth, like walking, and assessment of it serves no useful purpose
- b Language is so fundamental a part of being a human that to assess it at all (in view of the implied criticism this might entail) is a presumptuous act
- c Comment on different individual stages of maturation does little to hasten or aid development. It is not assessment that promotes language growth, but time and opportunity to use language

- d Language learning is very different from learning anything else in the curriculum. Language is an internal phenomenon; it is also called a 'subject'. No other subject in the curriculum experiences this duality. Other subjects are external (in the sense that they have a clearly specified content) and must be brought to the learner. "Content" in English cannot be prescribed in the same way.

This extreme position was resisted for several reasons. In the first place, the NESC had established in their syllabus guidelines certain goals of instruction and in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the new curriculum it seemed reasonable to try and measure the extent to which these goals had been or had not been achieved. Assessment of student performance played a vital part in this process. In order to assess classroom programmes in English it is necessary to evaluate student activity. The second reason for rejecting the proposition was the pressure for accountability from many groups. These pressures were acknowledged to be legitimate and it was recognised that schools have a responsibility to provide progress reports on the effect of instruction. A further reason had to do with the politics of power within the school setting. Implicit in every school's curriculum is the message that if it is important, it's assessed. Whether the assessment is through testing or by some other means is not important. What is significant is that to remove English from the mainstream of assessment would be to deny its importance. This would result in such an outcry from teachers, parents, students, employers, politicians and even curriculum developers that for all practical purposes it is not a tenable proposition to decline to assess performance in language in English classes.

Is English an Unmeasurable Subject?

The "Statement of Aims" gives three general aims for teachers of English, but it is true that they are very general. Furthermore, they deal with affective and cognitive outcomes that are very difficult to pin down. What exactly do we mean by "imaginative and emotional responsiveness to language"? What exactly is "awareness of ideas and values through language"? These aims or goals deal with subtle aspects of a student's encounters with language. Teachers want their students to use their imaginations, to express their feelings, to be moved by the reading of literature, to explore and develop ideas and values, to respect the language. It is clear some students do these things, but when the teacher is asked for proof it is sometimes difficult to provide evidence which will satisfy an aggressive questioner. A solution which is sometimes sought is to look at those aspects of the curriculum in English which can be specified with some precision (spelling, punctuation, and so on), assess performance in these areas since there is seldom disagreement about whether or not the student has actually achieved what has been measured, and treat the other aims as desirable outcomes which might occur incidentally but which cannot be readily measured. In effect, this is what examinations do.

What is needed to measure student achievement in English is a clear specification of what is to be measured and agreement on what will be accepted as evidence that the thing to be measured has been achieved. Teachers have to judge how a student thinks or feels from what that student says or writes and there is no certainty the teacher's judgment is going to be accurate. Because measuring use of language is less exact than measuring the colour of people's eyes or the number of calories consumed, there must be some room for personal judgment. The general aims need to be translated into behavioural objectives (since behaviour is an outcome of instruction which can be observed) and student achievement can then be assessed against these objectives. The objective might be a particular skill (eg, the ability to read and understand directions, or the ability to write a clear instruction) or it might be some knowledge (eg, knowledge of certain conventions of communication such as metaphor or irony) or it might be an attitude (eg, tolerance: The student is prepared to listen to others and to think about what others say). Evidence that the objective has been achieved might be an oral response to a question or the production of a sample of writing, observation of the student's behaviour in a small group, or some other observable product which can be recognised by an assessor.

There seemed to be consensus that 'English' was measurable, but the issue which this conclusion brought about was the difficulty of defining the areas for assessment and the related criteria upon which performance was to be judged. The difficulty lies, not so much in defining the areas for assessment, but in establishing criteria in areas which are dependent on accounting for individual differences in performance and in rates of growth. There was also a danger of a fragmentation of the curriculum if "language" and "language development" was divided into thousands of specific behavioural objectives. If the world of English is divided into tiny fragments of learning there is a danger the overall aims are lost sight of.

How is Student Performance Best Measured?

It is assumed, then, that performance in English can be measured. How is it best done? This becomes a crucial issue, particularly in a country like New Zealand where assessment in the three final years of secondary education has traditionally been by national external examinations.

It is possible to assess students by comparing one student with another, producing a ranking of students in order, or it is possible to assess students against some yardstick, thereby establishing their proficiency in absolute terms. These two options are usually labelled norm-referenced assessment or criterion-referenced assessment. For some purposes (usually research) relative assessment (norm-referenced) has merit. But to tell parents and employers about a student, relative assessment gives little information. A student can be in the top half of a group where no one has yet learned to write clearly. Furthermore, any system of assessment based on the normal curve of distribution faces a major disadvantage when such a distribution is translated into marks in a competitive examination. The pass-fail concept is closely identified with such an assessment model in people's minds. Those at the top are successes and those at the bottom are failures. 'East is east and west is west and ne'er the twain shall meet'. The implication

is that if the "normal" curve is used as the basis for recording achievement, half of the population will be disadvantaged because they have been labelled inferior. In a Platonic universe perhaps "below average" would not carry the pejorative overtones the word "failure" does. But in the real world the human consequences of labelling students failures are serious. Their morale and sense of self-worth is affected. Their self-respect is destroyed. This labelling is counter-productive to those purposes of assessment which are related to personal growth and clearly counter to general goals of education such as promoting the desire for self-respect and a concern for others.

The New Zealand School Certificate is, by and large, a national external examination which ranks and scales student achievement on the basis of the normal curve of distribution. This occurs at the end of the fifth form year (year 10 in Australia). It may be a normal curve but its effects are far from normal. For at least half the students, in spite of some recent cosmetic surgery, it operates as a form of terminal academic atrophy. Those who get it don't need it. Those who need it don't get it. The able who achieve their School Certificate go on to achieve further qualifications in the sixth and seventh forms; the less able leave with nothing, or very little. "Failure" in SC English, as in other subjects, does little to enhance job prospects of the school leaver and is unlikely to act as a spur to further learning.

Where selection for further education is not an important issue, assessment based on the normal curve is neither particularly useful nor successful.

- 1 It assumes that language performance in the student population at large varies from the very poor to the very good in regular and consistent proportions. I think this assumption is false
- 2 It assumes that half the students are less than competent. They are not. Most students leave school and are able to hold down jobs, establish and maintain relationships and live useful and successful lives
- 3 It carries pejorative notions of inferiority implicit in the minds of some students. Such labelling is both inaccurate and inhumane
- 4 It is designed to emphasise differences among members of the sample population and not what the individual can do or achieve.

It seems to me that the image of a series of steps going up to a summit (whether the summit is that of the foothills nearby or the distant mountains of educational cloud-cuckooland is not important) serves as a better model for assessment purposes than the bell-shaped normal distribution curve. As John Donne might have said, 'Ask not for whom the bell tolls: It tolls for School Certificate.'

ASSESSMENT OF LANGUAGE GROWTH

Faced with the well-established tradition of an external examination in Form 5 in New Zealand, the NESC made some general observations about assessment of language growth, and then proceeded to make recommendations about how this assessment might best be achieved.

PURPOSE AND AUDIENCE

The appropriateness and effectiveness of language can be judged only in relation to the purpose for which it is used and the audience for whom it is intended. Any assessment should include not only the student's proficiency at the time, but also an indication of his potential achievement. Comprehensive assessment of students' speaking and writing abilities must be based on a wide range of samples from different situations. A formal, external examination provides, in effect, only one audience - the examiner - and one purpose, demonstrating the ability to respond to the examiner's demands.

GROWTH IN LANGUAGE

Because students' linguistic responses to an increasing range of experience are often varied and sometimes slow, and because they relate closely to their experience outside the school, growth in language can be reliably assessed only over a considerable period. Recent research findings* suggest that sometimes there is little or no measurable growth over a considerable period.

Reporting

Reporting should reflect the purposes of evaluation. It is for the benefit of students, parents, teachers and interested members of the community. In order to communicate the nature of the individual student's development in language, reporting should:

Be understood by all

Be the result of continuing assessments

Show a wide range of the student's language achievements

Comprise a number of useful and constructive statements.

THE STUDENT LANGUAGE PROFILE

The NESC recommended that reporting should move towards the development of a student language profile, since the mastery of language is a complex combination of cultural and social learning, and performance in various language modes depends on different bases of experience and different skills. A student language profile, which describes a student's strengths and weaknesses in language use, is likely to be a more helpful means of promoting

* Lobar, Walter "Language Development: Kindergarten Through Grade Twelve," National Council of Teachers of English, Illinois, 1976.

language growth than a single grade or mark. The language profile can be used to comment on individual growth within the different language modes and can describe language achievement over a broad range of activities. Any school system which assesses language should allow teachers time to assess growth and should not be restricted to a narrow range of skills. The student language profile allows for continuous and progressive assessment and enables comment on a range of language abilities.

FORM 5 ENGLISH (NESC)

As a result of developments in English teaching from 1970 to 1975 the NESC recommended to the School Certificate Examination Board in 1975 that a two-year trial scheme for new approaches to the teaching of English at Form 5 be set up. This recommendation was accepted. A two-year trial was arranged for 1976-77, involving 12 schools.

"Holding Years" were declared for 1978-79 while the NESC, the schools themselves and the sub-committee set up by the SCEB evaluated the trial.

The trial of English (NESC) in Form 5 was recommended as a trial of a new approach to the teaching of English based upon the National English Syllabus Committee's guidelines outlined in the "Statement of Aims". Students' performance was to be assessed internally.

The Aims of the Trial

The aims of the trial were, therefore:

To allow trial schools to develop fifth form English programmes based on the National English Syllabus Committee's "Statement of Aims"

To allow each school to develop its own systems of cumulative assessment and methods of reporting suited to the needs of its students and community

To bring about more effective teaching of English

To enable further moves towards internal assessment to take place through the knowledge and experience gained by trial schools

To investigate the teaching and assessment of those aspects of English which are not amenable to external examination.

REASONS FOR INTERNAL ASSESSMENT

The proposal to introduce internal assessment came about because of the NESC's belief that two of the main purposes of assessment are to make students aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, and to supply teachers with the data upon which to plan language programmes to meet the students' needs.

The language aims outlined in the "Statement of Aims" provide the basis for this approach to assessment.

The NESC believed that a single national examination in English cut across many of the developments taking place in the subject.

Schools were developing programmes to suit the differing needs of students from diverse language backgrounds. These programmes encouraged students to reveal their language strengths, whereas the external examination emphasised an arbitrary level of attainment.

The written examination only tested effectively two of the language modes (reading and writing). The other six modes of language (speaking, listening, viewing, shaping, moving, watching) were either ignored or given superficial treatment.

Moreover, growth in language occurs over a long period and should only be measured over such a time. The single mark awarded also disguises developmental levels students may have achieved within the different language modes. NESC believed that students' language growth should be assessed in all eight modes throughout a year and those in which they needed most development would receive more emphasis and hence more frequent evaluation.

NESC considered that internal assessment allowed for flexibility in the development of programmes to suit local conditions and needs. Able students were given the motivation to reach their full potential, while less able students were helped to achieve competence in communication.

PROCEDURES GUIDING THE TRIAL OF ENGLISH (NESC)

1 The trial schools would assess their students' abilities in all eight modes of English (speaking, listening, reading, writing, moving, shaping, viewing, watching). These modes were related to the language aims of the programme by a wide variety of activities and methods which were planned by staff in consultation among themselves and with members of the NESC. Examples of the language programmes developed in the schools are on display.

2 Schools were to decide their own priorities for the weighting accorded to the various modes. The NESC recommended that numerical assessments could be dispensed with, but the School Certificate Examination Board insisted that students be given a numerical mark which would be comparable with other students who had sat the external examination in English. On the basis of its own internal assessments each school produced its own rank order of all fifth form students. Procedures for determining the rank order list were determined primarily by the trial schools.

3 The issue of moderation between schools was a crucial one. There is a broad-based pressure to have a school's assessments moderated, when assessments are required on a more extensive basis than local school-based use. This pressure is felt in New Zealand at the end of the fifth form, which corresponds roughly with the age at which compulsory schooling finishes. The main reason for the pressure seems to come from the desire to protect the principle of equal opportunity for all. A moderation which enables some comparability between assessments from school to school also provides some protection against nepotism in job appointments, particularly for students from less advantaged backgrounds. A moderated assessment, in theory at least, allows students from diverse

backgrounds to compete on an equal basis for the diminishing number of jobs available in a shrinking market. Whether a leaving certificate should be seen as a meal ticket is a moot point, but it is certainly one of the uses to which it is put, and when places available are limited, either in higher education or in employment, the demand for a moderated assessment becomes much stronger.

Moderation in the trial schools was initially determined using a means analysis system. This involved pooling the actual marks gained by candidates in their other School Certificate subjects and determining a general ability factor which was then used in turn to scale (if necessary) the marks submitted by a school in English.

The system was useful as an interim measure and it gave schools considerable flexibility in determining their own language programmes to suit local conditions and needs. However, schools did decide that if English was to be moderated, it was preferable that the moderation should be based on ability in English and not upon ability in other subjects. This year (1980) a reference test is being used to provide a school with a pool of marks which are then allocated to individual candidates according to the school's assessments. The reference test includes multiple-choice items and a test of writing, and is used as a measure of groups of students, not of individuals. The main function of the reference test is to provide comparability between schools. It may also be used to determine comparability between classes.

4 There was also a strong recommendation that schools begin work on developing a student language profile. One of the constraints that was reluctantly accepted by the NESC was that students would still be ranked. However, the committee believed that the experience of the trial might provide some guidance to teachers which would enable moves towards assessment by a system of levels of achievement to take place. The development of an acceptable student language profile was a necessary pre-requisite before such an alternative would be acceptable. Work on this aspect of the trial is still continuing, and at the conclusion of this address I should like those present to discuss the paper by Alan Purves and Tony Gavin entitled "Assessment in English: Possible Future Implications for NESC". This paper gives a possible basis for the development of the student language profile in four broad categories: Facility with language; individuality and independence; tolerance and co-operation; and confidence and enjoyment.

EVALUATION OF THE TRIAL

The evaluation by the NESC and the schools has considered the effects on students, on teachers, on principals, and on parents.

Students:

Evaluation has been made of students' attitudes to the subject, levels of achievement, and the relationship between performance in the various modes.

Surveys of student opinion made through questionnaires at schools indicate markedly improved student attitudes to English as a subject. All other schools confirm this. Schools also report that levels of achievement of student work have improved. The range and variety of written work has increased and the quality of both spoken and written language has been appreciably better. There have been no firm conclusions reached about correlations between the modes. Able students often but not invariably seem to perform well in all modes, while poorer students may sometimes perform well in one mode but often do poorly in all modes. The research that has been undertaken in this field into the relationship between speaking and writing^{into} the relationship between viewing and writing has been inconclusive. Overall student response to the trial has been extremely favourable.

Teachers:

Evaluation has been made of teachers' attitudes to the subject, comparisons with a "traditional" School Certificate English course, methods of teaching and students' attitudes as known by teachers.

Teachers, with only one or two exceptions, are extremely supportive of the trial scheme for NESC English for School Certificate. Their general morale has been sustained by the teaching gains they have seen from this approach to the teaching of English. There has been a growth of professional responsibility and teacher accountability and most have welcomed this. Teachers have appreciated the freedom and flexibility this approach to the teaching of English has given them, since they perceive the benefits this approach has for students in the classroom. Teachers who have had experience both of the "traditional" approach to the teaching of English and the internal assessment of English for School Certificate are reluctant to return to the examination system. There has been marked professional growth among teachers who have been involved in the trial and this has led to improved methods of teaching. Teachers also report that student motivation is much better under the programme followed by NESC English for School Certificate.

Parents:

Evaluation has been made of parents' own attitudes, parents' opinion of students' attitudes, and the value of the reporting system used by the school.

Surveys of parent opinion by the schools indicate the majority of parents supported the trial of English (NESC) for School Certificate. Parents over the past three years have been on average 90% in favour of the trial. Advantages noted were the fairness of the system since examination nerves were not a factor, the removal of tension, the improved motivation, the wider range of language activities, the increased emphasis on individual needs, an improvement in students' oral competence and confidence and an increase in reading. Disadvantages cited were the possibility of teacher-student personality clashes, lack of practice for subsequent examinations, the lack of a back-up examination, and a fear this approach would lead to a "decline in literary standards."

The Department of Education also commissioned a survey of parents' opinions. This was conducted independently by the Research and Statistics Division. This survey showed that the majority of parents (95%) were aware that their children were being internally assessed in English for School Certificate. The major source of information for parents about internal assessment was from their children, either orally (79%) or in written form (60%).

Over half of the parents were happy (40%) or very happy (17%) about the efforts made by the school to explain about internal assessment whilst less than a fifth were unhappy (13%) or very unhappy (4%). Also only a very small number of parents seemed unconcerned (5%).

Although only a few parents (12%) preferred the external approach to assessing English for School Certificate, the remaining parents were split almost evenly between internal assessment (42%) or partial external examination - internal assessment (44%).

Principals:

Evaluation was made of the principals' views about student attitudes, teacher attitudes, parent attitudes, and a comparison was made with the previous examination English course.

All the principals were enthusiastic about the trial scheme. They were positive that the NESC syllabus and assessment system were favourable in fostering better work habits, better teacher-pupil relationships, the general educational objectives, and a wider range of language activities.

Their comments on student attitudes suggest that students work harder and to a better purpose, that standards of presentation have improved, that pupils see greater relevance in all their work and have accepted the view that it is fairer to have all class work taken into account for assessment. The few who initially feared teacher prejudice would affect their assessment seemed to have accepted teachers in the role of assessors.

Principals' comments on teacher attitudes indicate teachers developed a close rapport with students, and were more aware of individual students' needs, strengths and weaknesses. More time was spent on preparation, marking, reporting and at meetings. Teachers were dissatisfied with the award of a percentage mark rather than a grade. The co-operative team approach has done much to assist in the development of teachers' professional education.

Staff at times complained about the additional work load but all proclaimed that they would not revert to the external examination scheme because the English (NESC) scheme was far more rewarding because it allowed them to broaden their language programme and work in greater depth.

Principals' comments suggested parent reaction varied from region to region.

In each school the public relations exercises did much to allay parent opposition. Parents were prepared to be guided by the teaching staff who were able to explain the scheme. Several parents continued to challenge the scheme but more than 90% accepted it or considered that the issues were beyond their competence. Some parents did not adapt to the student language profile. They preferred a numerical mark which related to School Certificate.

To sum up, students, teachers, principals and parents supported the continuation and extension of English (NESC) for School Certificate.

This evaluation is fully documented in the complete record of the trial. This record consists of over 2000 pages of information which details every aspect of the development of the trial.

REPORTING PROCEDURES

The development of the student language profile, a written report on a student's strengths and weaknesses in language, was seen by the NESC as an important outcome of the trial. The intention was that the profile would either replace or augment the traditional report form.

During the trial, schools had the freedom to experiment with methods of recording the results of assessments and reporting on them to students, parents and employers. Developments over the two years of the trial were aimed at eliminating unnecessary duplication from the task of recording, as it was inevitably a time-consuming process. Three main types of recording were used: The student's log book, the teacher's log book, and the traditional mark book or roll book. No one method emerged as being most valid.

The information gathered in the records was used to produce a profile of each student. Some schools developed a grid system under the various modes. Other schools preferred a completely unstructured approach and gave out what amounted to a blank sheet of paper with guidelines provided separately by the Head of Department. Still others found a compromise between these extremes.

A comparison between profiles developed independently in trial and non-trial schools, shows that involvement in the trial refined teachers' methods of assessment in all modes and encouraged them to be specific in their comments. Profiles written in trial schools were more inclined to show a deeper understanding of the individual student's language growth and less inclined towards vague generalisations or traditional report-form clichés describing behaviour.

The sample profiles described student language competence under the headings of writing, presentation and organisation, oral work, reading and general attitude. There is a clear indication employers need more exposure to this way of reporting before they will find it generally acceptable.

Some employers welcomed the profiles because of their explicit treatment of students' particular aptitudes. Others wished to use marks to provide a comparative basis for job selection.

SUMMARY

The NESC and the schools themselves believe the aims of the trial (Paragraph 4) have been achieved.

The major benefits have been for the students, who have shown better motivation and increased competence in a wider range and variety of language tasks. Professionally, the trial has proved very valuable to teachers, who have shown considerable professional growth during their involvement from 1976.

The results of teachers' work, which have been developed from the complete record of the trial and which will form the basis of pamphlets for teachers in the "Resource Book for English, Forms 3 to 5", will have significance for all teachers of English in New Zealand.

A number of sample programmes of work developed in the trial will be included in the Resource Book to give guidance to teachers. The sample programmes illustrate how an English course can be developed from the "Statement of Aims".

The development of the language profile seems to the NESC and to the schools to be a constructive and helpful way to assess students' performances. There is still a need for more public relations with parents and employers to show what is involved in the profile.

It is the belief of the NESC and the trial schools that the approach adopted in this trial has led to more effective teaching of English. There has been considerable benefit to the teachers involved in the schools, and benefits are being appreciated beyond those schools through subsequent teacher transfers and in-service training.

ASSESSMENT IN ENGLISH : POSSIBLE FUTURE

IMPLICATIONS FOR NESC

A C Purves and A P Gavin

(This is a summary report of findings from a seminar on the Assessment of English chaired by Dr Alan Purves, and held in Wellington on August 16-17 1977. A list of participants is included in Appendix II.)

One of the major concerns of any curriculum is the assessment of student performance. This concern looms particularly large with respect to English, for one must assess the performance of students in their native language. Nearly everyone is competent in their use of certain aspects of language: they can talk; they can understand much of what other people say. Most can read to a certain extent, and most can write. When considering secondary school performance, therefore, one must go beyond such a bare minimum, but at the same time avoid the picayune. It becomes especially important to define the goals of instruction carefully.

A second issue facing those who assess student performance lies in its basis. One may assess students against each other, producing a ranking of students, or one may assess them against some criterion thereby asserting their proficiency in absolute terms. For some purposes, most notably research purposes, relative assessment has merit; for telling employers and others concerned with the individual student about that student, relative assessment brings little information. A student can be in the top half of a group none of whom has learned to write clearly. The current school certificate system has the disadvantage of giving little information; further its use of ranking can lead to the implication that roughly half the students in New Zealand are less than competent, a palpable falsehood. It is further limited by giving a single mark - in English - rather than any indication of a student's capability as a reader, writer, speaker or listener.

For these reasons, the English Syllabus requires a new kind of certificate, one reflecting the curriculum and one reflecting the real concerns of schools, students, and the public. In a seminar held in Wellington in August, 1977, these issues were discussed

and various approaches to the assessment of student performance were weighed. During the course of the seminar there emerged a consensus concerning several issues:

- 1 The use of a single mark at the School Certificate or Form 5 level had less meaning than a profile describing a student's performance.
- 2 A profile would be of use at any point at which a student leaves school.
- 3 There is a broad-based pressure to moderate a school's report on a student's performance. A moderating test of general verbal ability would suffice but for the control and comparability of profiles, a single profile format monitored by school visits and inspection of syllabus and records would be preferable.
- 4 If a moderating test were to be developed, it should be able to be scored on the basis of level of proficiency (e.g., reading age level) rather than on a simple curve. The reporting could then be based on the proportion of a group achieving a given level. Such reporting should be adequate to compare schools or regions.
- 5 Assessment can be continuous and cumulative. One should not assume that all relevant skills are not mastered until the end of Form 5; rather, the mastery of skills should be recorded when they occur be it Form 3, 4 or 5. A profile therefore, contains recordings of student competence whenever it has been achieved. Such a form of duplication prevents wasteful duplication of effort and helps assure a continuous flow of work.

IMPLICATIONS

- 1 A profile suggests that student competence in language can be described at more than one level. Furthermore, that these levels can be operationally defined.
- 2 The present English trial identified 8 modes of language expression. Do these provide the elements of the profile or does one organize different reference points (e.g., concepts or generic skills) to express language performance?
- 3 Can the elements of language be described with equal precision for the purposes of the description of competence? It may be that teachers will accept standard test results in certain areas (i.e., reading, writing) but be unhappy with such measures in other areas (i.e., attitudes).
- 4 Comparability. Present methods generally use a reference test of some form. This test provides either
 - a an index of pupil achievement providing quantitative levels of pupil achievement (external exam)
 - b an index for which teacher assessment can be scaled to achieve comparable assessment.

It is possible to achieve comparability by stating clearly defined levels of competence and reporting student performance in terms of these stated levels. If a standard method (i.e., test) is used to determine where a student performs in terms of these levels then the statement can be comparable in that all students achieving at the level have been defined in a similar way.

The levels may be of various types

- 1 age related
- 2 basic mastery of defined skills at defined levels
- 3 hierarchical attainment ¹⁹ of broad modes of language skills

with higher levels reflecting increasing autonomy with language usage (domain referenced type).

- c if one designed a series of measures to sample the broad domain "Facility with Language" for example, one could describe relative levels of student performance on defined criteria. The criteria being identical for all would make the student's performance comparable. The levels could be broadly hierarchical so that student performance at the highest levels would clearly indicate superior language skills. Furthermore, one would validate such a description of student competence by defining at the time of test construction the elements of student ability necessary to score at the various levels.

Comparability then, is not one of comparing student against student, but comparing the student against levels of pre-determined language competence. These levels of competence could be hierarchical in the sense that achieving at the highest level reflected a high degree of autonomy with language, while at the lower levels functional competence (i.e., at the lowest level a student might read at say - borderline readability for that age) that is limited to the type of material they can read as opposed to the student at the highest level who has advanced reading skills and thus has autonomy over the choice of reading material.

- d the result of these standard assessments would form an integral part of a student's profile at the Form 5 level. They could be used by -

- 1 Schools for selection of students for Form 6 study;
- 2 Employers to assist with gaining insight into students language skills;
- 3 Students and parents as a part of the broad description of language ability.

CRITERIA OF PERFORMANCE IN ENGLISH

Having accepted these general principles, the members of the seminar then proceeded to define the areas for assessment and criteria for performance. Defining the areas for assessment proves a somewhat easier task than defining criteria, for although there may be absolute criteria for certain kinds of performance, several areas are dependent upon an accounting for individual differences in performance and in rates of growth. One might assert that all students in Form 5 should be able to give simple directions clearly, but one cannot assert that all students should reach a given level of creativity even if it could be adequately defined. Nonetheless, it was agreed that student profiles should include assessment of such aspects of performance like creativity and initiative, for such matters are of concern to those who need the results of assessment: employers, teachers at higher levels, and, most particularly, the students themselves and their families.

The areas of assessment include four broad categories: facility with language; individuality and independence; tolerance and cooperation; and confidence and enjoyment (a sample profile sheet appears in Appendix I). As one may surmise, the first area includes the major skills and concepts of English; the second, third, and fourth include the main affective outcomes, each of which also forms an important aspect of linguistic competence.

Facility with Language

This area includes the four major sub-areas - reading, writing, speaking and listening - and the contributory areas of watching and viewing and moving and shaping. Proficiency in English is primarily seen as an individual's use of spoken and written language, and proficiency in the other modes might be said to be the concern of arts instruction. These modes serve their pedagogical purpose, however, and an understanding of some of their concepts can help the writer, reader, speaker, listener, or audience of the media.

The major dimensions of the area are range and complexity. An able reader, for example, is so because he or she can read a
 21 variety of materials from workbooks to legal documents to stories and because he or she can comprehend passages of complexity within

this range. Assessment of performance, therefore, must speak to these dimensions in each of the four major sub-areas. Range includes range of situations or contexts, range of audiences, range of topic, and range of purposes of the speaker or writer.

Complexity includes complexity of vocabulary, complexity of syntax, complexity of organization, and complexity of ideas. Each of these could be further specified, but to assess and report on a long list of specifics would prove cumbersome. At the same time, students are asked to perform across the wide range in their various school subjects, and assessment of reading or writing performance should include examination of science reports, history texts read with comprehension, and the like. The English teacher could ask for a sample of a student's work from other teachers.

One might, therefore, set forth an indication of range which would suffice to give an index of a student's performance.

READING: directions
 explanation of a process
 argument based on evidence
 narration
 persuasion
 poetry

WRITING: report
 narrative
 persuasion
 explanation

SPEAKING: report
 persuasion
 group discussion
 explanation

LISTENING: group discussion
 note-taking
 directions

Obviously other situations could be included - drama, oral interpretation, writing of poetry, and assembling a book, but

these listed would seem to form a core.

The major criteria for judgement would be clarity, accuracy, and adherence to conventions. Does the speaker or writer make sense? Does the speaker or writer report accurately? Does the speaker or writer follow the common conventions (spelling, punctuation, usage, etc.)? It would seem that clarity and accuracy are necessary to competence; adherence to conventions is desirable. In reading or listening, does the reader or listener comprehend the sense of the message, the tone of the utterance, and the purpose of the writer or speaker?

These questions could be determined through common measures asking for comprehension of written and oral material at a specified level (e.g., age 12 for reading, descriptive writing). Speaking and listening might be reported by the teacher following a set of standardized situations (giving directions, following directions, giving an oral report, taking notes on an oral presentation).

Reading, writing, and listening can be assessed with standardized mass measures. But it must be remembered that they form but part of the curriculum and but part of the desired information. Speaking is probably best assessed informally, with criteria for the rating being specified.

CLARITY: Does the listener have to ask for explanation?

ACCURACY: Can the listener follow the directions and produce what the speaker desires?

THOUGHTFULNESS: Does the listener think the speaker to have considered alterations?

ADAPTATION: Does the listener think the speaker to have adjusted presentation to a particular situation or audience?

Other Aspects of Communicative Competence

The profile sheet indicates that even for reading, writing, and listening there are certain aspects that, while not susceptible to a standardized format, form common curricular concerns and can be accurately assessed by a teacher or observer. One may observe attentiveness in listening or in reading across a range of topics and materials and may note that range. One may note whether a student edits first drafts as a matter of course. One may note the maturity of syntax used (whether the student uses many simple sentences or combines them into compound and complex sentences). One may note whether students sense the emotional content of the literature they read and report their own reactions to it. Each of these notations could be accompanied by an example as proof of accomplishment. Some qualitative dimensions and their attributes follow.

A THOUGHTFULNESS

Some of its main manifestations in students:

- * preparedness to think about issues that confront them - from literature, film, discussion material;
- * willingness to probe, to go deeper than the superficial, to look for reasons and relationships;
- * curiosity and questioning;
- * willingness to consider alternative points of view, and to try to see issues from these other points of view;
- * moving into appreciation of passive reception;
- * producing work (tape, film, writing, etc.) through processes involving rehearsal, redrafting.

B RESPONSIVENESS

It involves the willingness, sensitivity, capacity to respond to a wider range of increasingly complex stimuli and inputs.

It suggests going beyond a mere passive hearing or reading into

appreciation and activity.

It may be affective or cognitive correct or overt.

C ARTICULATENESS

This quality may be seen as an alternative description of the criterion for communicative competence without regard to mode of presentation.

1 Definitions and objectives

- a To combine ideas with clarity and accuracy
- b To increase students' repertoire of communication strategies for combining ideas with clarity and precision

2 Distinctions

Articulateness should be distinguished from fluency and flexibility. Fluency refers to rate of production: flexibility to category shifts in production.

3 Characteristics of Articulateness

- a Combining relationships:
Ideas may be combined through the use of temporal sequence
Spatial ordering
Comparison, contrast, analogy
classification, subordination
implication, transformation
free association
- b Clarity:
Clarity relates to the capability of the student to take into account the frame of reference of the addressee
- c Accuracy/Precision:

4 Evidence for Articulateness

- *Sentence complexity
- *Form/range/appropriateness of the combining arrangements
- *Use of presupposition and implication
- *Situational adjustments in communication; use of register
- Choice of words

5 Situations in which Articulateness is likely to be observed

- *Discussion of abstract ideas which would follow on from the discussion at a concrete level
- *Expressing judgements; reading critically
- *Giving directions
- *Making explanations

6 Additional Notes

- *Articulation is governed by the thinking processes available to the child at his particular stage of intellectual development.

Performance in Other Modes

Performance in matching, viewing, moving and shaping are important adjuncts to the central skills in language. At the same time, the expectations of competence in each of these modes is modified by the realization of differences in talents. A thoughtful writer or reader or speaker may not be competent or expressive in either moving or shaping. What counts most is an understanding of the uses of movement in speech or the effect of layout on writing. Such awareness could be assessed objectively but could also be assessed by the teacher based on observation of a variety of performances. Such observation can be informal and cumulative.

It may be important, however, to assess understanding of the techniques of media (television, newspapers, radio, etc.) through some means other than the teacher's judgment. School or regional tests could be created using local materials, to assess student's understanding of slanting, use of visual devices to modify print, editing, semantic distortion, and the like. The criterion would be whether the student was aware of the basic techniques used in the media that appear daily.

Knowledge

Although some may argue that the curriculum does not conceive of knowledge in the same way that earlier curricula did, one does not necessarily have to have a rote knowledge of Shakespeare. Yet there are certain desiderata:

1 Knowledge of certain literary conventions:

plot, drama, lyric, setting, melodrama, tragedy, comedy.

2 Knowledge of certain conventions of communication:

speaker-audience, rhetorical structures (definition, classification, comparison-contrast), metaphor, irony, persuasive devices.

3 Concepts about language;

semantics, word-thing relationships, register, grammatical terminology, the concept of a sentence, distinction between grammar and usage.

4 Knowledge of specific literary works:

major figures in Greek, English, Maori Mythology, major New Zealand writers, common figures in literature (e.g., Romeo, Sherlock Holmes, Fagin) who are often used as reference points.

Each of these aspects of knowledge could be measured by an externally provided test, but whether internally or externally tested, the knowledge must be of the concept or term in operation, not simply of a dictionary definition. For example the knowledge of irony should be measured by the student's having, initially, to recognize irony and possibly having to produce an ironic statement.

Independence and Involvement

These qualities in a student may be seen as two sides of a coin. If a student is involved in working with English, that student may well display qualities of independent thinking, experimentation, and initiative.

1 Involvement with the subject may be manifest in the following actions, even though it cannot be predicted or quantitatively measured. In observing involvement one might observe these characteristics

- a energy and enthusiasm - motivation
- b willingness to diverge from set structure
- c work of a level of competence which may not have been presumed by the teacher.

To illustrate these points:

- a energy may be manifested by the student's
 - i engaging enthusiastically in purposeful activity
 - ii doing extra research;
 - iii working longer hours;
- b divergence might be manifest in the student's
 - i willingness to break conventions
 - ii finding different new paths to goals

Examples

- *Choose a new mode in response to a poem.
- *Vary response within same mode.
- *Discuss and modify an already written response.
- *Try out opinions in a discussion.

Independence

Some criteria of independence may be that the student is

- 1 Able to operate competently in a variety of modes appropriate to the situation.
- 2 Able to generate activities himself.
- 3 Be willing to hold an opinion which may or may not be different from that of others.

- 4 Be willing to attempt to articulate the reasons for holding that opinion.
- 5 Possess an "internal epistemology" for that opinion - a kind of cogency.

Independence might also be thought of as individual practice and the part of the student, a manifestation of the voluntary attempt to get better at doing something.

The student may develop a work habit in certain situations (e.g., re-drafting a paper; re-reading a passage in a book for additional comprehension; rehearsing a play).

Some of the attributes of this aspect of independence include:

- a the ability to set goals
- b the willingness to accept/make criticism with diminished apprehension
- c the capability to modify behavior according to knowledge of results.

Tolerance and Cooperation

These are, of course, qualities of any "well educated" adult, but they have an important linguistic dimension.

Behavioral manifestations of tolerance include:

- a the student is prepared to listen to others, and particularly to think about what others say
- b the student accepts the fact that other people may hold different points of view
- c the student accepts different linguistic codes (e.g., accents, dialects, etc.)

- 14
- d the student is aware that there may be more than one response to many situations, that these varied responses may be all legitimate and appropriate

In sum, the student respects the worth of people who may be different, respects their ideas, language, views, prepared to consider what they say or write. But tolerance does not go to the extent of tolerating insincerity, the bogus and affected, or tolerance.

Language is the medium of cooperation, and in language, cooperation includes:

- a working together to achieve a common goal
- b being prepared to offer and listen to ideas and suggestions in producing a play, film, tape, poster, or the like
- c having respect for other people and acknowledging their right to be involved and to participate

ENJOYMENT AND CONFIDENCE

These qualities embrace a positive feeling associated with an activity. Enjoyment relates to 'excitement', 'delight', 'elation'.... Enjoyment of language should be distinguished from enjoyment of the interpersonal relationships associated with a language class.

Confidence is related to the personal self-esteem of an individual in using language.

Evidence for enjoyment can be seen in

- a The words that a student uses and the concomitant tone and body movement.
- b Spontaneous choice of a student and the voluntary participation and their using school type experiences in their personal lives.

- c Ability of a student to maintain interests under pressure from competing obligations.
- d Diminished apprehensions of an activity by a student.

The confidence that a student develops may have many indicators in that student's behavior; among them:

- *Eye contact
- *Ability to move in and out of discussions
- *Body movement (confident as opposed to anxious/nervous posture)
- *Prosodic features (fluency as opposed to hesitation, pauses)
- *Choice of words (strong valence as opposed to neutral words in risk situations)
- *Risk taking, initiating behavior, leadership
- *Ability to disagree in risk situations; security in one's belief systems
- *Accurate reading of people and situations
- *Resistance to pressure; diminished apprehension; relaxed, easy manner
- *Preparedness to refer to personal experiences; dispassionate viewing of self; positive self concept
- *Role flexibility; role acceptance

One must be aware of cultural variations in the valuing of 'confidence', and in the indicators of confidence, were also discussed (e.g., Samoan children tend to avoid eye contact with people in superior status, as a cultural norm). Further, confidence was regarded as a situation specific trait, related very much to familiarity with the situation.

Confidence, therefore, must be described in terms of various continua:

a Familiarity

Familiar situations

Unfamiliar situations

b Group size continuum

Small Group

Large group

APPENDIX I

Profile Sheet

Name

School

The following profile indicates the performance of the above-named student in various aspects of English. It indicates the competence of the student as and when it was assessed. If a student indicated competence in Forms III or IV, it was not assessed in subsequent years unless to indicate superior performance in those later years. The symbol C indicates competent performance; S superior performance; a blank indicates that competent performance had not been attained.

SPEAKING

Form III

Form IV

Form V

Clear presentation of ideas

Accurate presentation of process

Thoughtful discussion of ideas

Thoughtful discussion of feelings

Ability to adapt to situation

Comments:

LISTENING

Form III

Form IV

Form V

Understanding of complex presentation

Responsive to a variety of oral presentation

Ability to see intention of speaker

Awareness of propaganda techniques

Attentive in discussions

Thoughtful listener in discussion

Comments:

READING

Form III Form IV Form V

Comprehension of factual prose
Comprehension of written argument
Recognition of propaganda techniques
Responsive reading of fiction
Responsive reading of drama
Responsive reading of poetry
Reading of a range of materials
Comments and examples of materials read
with comprehension and responsiveness:

WRITING

Form III Form IV Form V

Accuracy in description
Clarity in presentation of ideas
Thoughtful development of ideas
Adaptation of style to audience
Use of a mature syntax
Accuracy in following conventions
Edits material
Writes in other subjects (Examples)
Comments:

PERFORMANCE IN OTHER MODES

Form III Form IV Form V

Effectiveness in presentation
Comprehension of material
Awareness of techniques in media
Comments and Examples:

KNOWLEDGE

Form III Form IV Form V

Basic conventions of literature
Basic conventions of communication
Concepts about language
Literary works
Comments and Examples:

INDEPENDENCE AND INVOLVEMENT

Form III Form IV Form V

Willingness to go beyond routine
Initiative
Individuality of thought
Ability to support individual opinion
Persistence in work
Carefulness and willingness to revise
Comments and Examples:

COOPERATION AND TOLERANCE

Form III Form IV Form V

Ability to work with others
Willingness to consider others' ideas
Understanding of othercultures
Understanding of social dialects
Acceptance of cultural and individual differences
Comments and Examples:

ENJOYMENT

Form III Form IV Form V

Pleasure in self-expression
Pride in performance
Expresses response to literature
Willingness to express self in writing
Reads for pleasure
Comments and Examples:

APPENDIX II

List of Seminar Members

A C Purves	University of Illinois, Chairman
R Aitken	Department of Education, Wellington
K Bale	Hutt Valley Memorial Technical College Wellington
C Bowley	University of Auckland
J Dickie	North Shore Teachers College, Auckland
A Gavin	Department of Education, Wellington
R Graham	Christchurch Teachers College, Secondary Division
G Griffiths	Department of Education, Auckland
D Gunn	Department of Education, Wellington
E Hawkins	Green Bay High School, Auckland
G Kennedy	Victoria University, Wellington
C Macintosh	Christchurch Boys High School
H McQueen	Department of Education, Wellington
K Millar	Department of Education, Wellington
A O'Rourke	Department of Education, Wellington
N Price	Hamilton Teachers College, Secondary Division
E Rathgen	Linwood High School, Christchurch
N Reid	New Zealand Council for Educational Research
R Robinson	Victoria University, Wellington
C Ross	Palmerston North Teachers College
J Strachan	Department of Education, Wellington
J Tamahori	Todd Motors
O Tate	Department of Education, Wellington
P Timmins	Department of Education, Hamilton